

Paper proposal

The High Road to Disgust: Elegant Disturbance in *Fu Bo* and *Happiness*

Until the growth of exploitation markets in the last quarter of the 20th Century, The tradition of horror film was to contain the extreme, the bodily, and morbid with formal restraint and social distinction. Val Lewton's *Cat People* (d. J. Tourneur, 1942) provides a classic example with the suggestion, but not the explicit depiction, of terrible things. Today's vampire films and TV series continue the pattern with constrained social settings that only rarely erupt into shocking carnal display. And when it does, it surprises and shocks as the sedate norm overturns into Psycho shock or Frenzy display (to mark Hitchcock's famous contribution to the genre).

In previous studies of horror and disgust I examined the Hong Kong films *Dumplings* (Fruit Chan, 2004), *The Untold Story* (aka *Human Pork Buns*, d. Danny Lee [Li Hsiu Hsien], 1993), *Spacked Out* (d. Lawrence Ah Mon, 2000), and *Public Toilet* (Fruit Chan 2004) and the Japanese film *Visitor Q* (Takashi Miike, 2001).

In this paper I want to continue my investigation by discussing how disturbing and disgusting themes and images are shaped through subtle formal devices and decisions to allow for both the urge to a disgusting reaction by the audience and also, simultaneously, to elevate the emotion and the reaction to a more reflective, even mannered, level for social and philosophical comment. Both films deal in dead bodies and cannibalism, but rather than seeking visceral shock, the films invite contemplation of larger issues in a form of social criticism. *Fu Bo* addresses duty and obligation but also the nature of the gift and combines genre expectations of hit man violence and magical realism. *Happiness* is a comic-acid critique of love and obligation, the family, and sexual predation of children. Precisely by risking portrayal of the taboo and abhorrent within somewhat sympathetic and perhaps humanistic frame, the films push into a disturbing a moral/ethical landscape and challenge the audience to think further, think anew.

"Cross-cultural disgust: \ some problems in the analysis of contemporary horror cinema. Part two: rewriting disgust," *Jump Cut* 52 (July 2010)

"Cross-cultural disgust: \ some problems in the analysis of contemporary horror cinema. Part one: notes on cross-cultural disgust," *Jump Cut* 51 (June 2009)

<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc51.2009/crosscultHorror/index.html>

"Serving the People: *Dumplings*," *Jump Cut* no. 49 (April 2007).
<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc49.2007/Dumplings/index.html>

interlocked stories, black comedy

Fu bo, 2003) [Kung-Lok Lee](#), [Ching-Po Wong](#)

Happiness, 1998, Todd Solondz

Human Centipede 1, 2,

Inside

In My Skin

Salo

titus